

# Stories are Buried in Places

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## Contentions<sup>i</sup>

My demonstration is meant to suggest and support my contentions that:

1. Life experience is at the heart of good writing
2. Sketching is a playground for developing seed ideas
3. Reading mentor text examples in the genre *before* writing helps one understand the characteristics and features that are unique to the genre

## The Approach/Process<sup>ii</sup>

Sketching is a powerful approach for recording life's daily observations. The "story map" is a powerful prewriting strategy for generating seed ideas. Everyone has a story to tell and many say that stories are buried in places. Digging up stories from our life and literally mapping them out is an engaging way to grow writing territories. Not only does illustrating force elaboration, but it opens our eyes and hearts to the beauty of life surrounding us.

- Read aloud a short text example from a memoir, life story, or autobiographical piece.
- Discuss how this genre is connected to life experience and how many of the important stories in our lives are rooted in important places.
- Think of a place you know quite well i.e., neighborhood you presently live in, neighborhood you grew up in, relative's house, vacation spot you have gone to several times, etc.
- Share a model of a map (create your own or use Ralph Fletcher's from *How to Write Your Life Story*)
- *Sketch* a map of this place. Be sure to include as many details as possible. \*Don't worry about making the drawing look professional, simply let go and create!
- After a majority of the sketching is done, begin labeling your map to mark where something happened, a favorite spot, a secret place, a danger spot, or any other thoughts that come to mind.
- "X" marks the spot or in this case, the treasure of the story you would like to try on or explore.
- Pair-Share "X" marks the spot stories. Talking provides the writer an opportunity to try on the story before investing. Oral sharing helps with organization, development, and also shines the spotlight of awareness on intentional craft.
- Get the lead out! Provide time for writing about the "X" marks the spot story (some may writers may decide to select another seed based on how the pair-share went).
- Opportunity to share writing.
- Close with a reminder that there are other stories that can be dug up. Suggestion: place map in writer's notebook or transfer labels off map to authority list in notebook.

## Bibliography/Related Reading<sup>iii</sup>

Fletcher, Ralph. *How to Write Your Life Story*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007. Print.

*“When I started working on Marshfield Dreams, one of the first things I did was sketch a map of the neighborhood where I grew up”.*

Fletcher, Ralph. “School”. *Marshfield Dreams: When I Was a Kid*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005. Print.

*Read aloud “School” excerpt from this text.*

Fletcher, Ralph. “The Writer’s Notebook.” *School Talk* 6.2 (2001): 1-2.

*“Our writers need to write for a specific purpose. But they will also grow by fooling around with ideas, words, images, phrases.”*

Wood Ray, Katie. *Study Driven: A Framework for Planning Units of Study in the Writing Workshop*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2006. Print.

*“Memoir is a type of autobiographical non-fiction where a writer takes a reflective stance in looking back on a particular time in his or her life. The time may be connected to a particular event that happened during that time, or to a person, a place, or an object from that time that is particularly vivid. Memoir is most often written in first person, in the past tense, and generally has some quality of reflection attached to it.”*

## Samples<sup>iv</sup>

- Ralph Fletcher’s “Story Map”-handout- taken from, *Marshfield Dreams: When I Was a Kid*
- **Amber White**  
**Written Response Generated by Story Map**

Some of my favorite memories as a child were playing games with my family. Saturday night in the summertime was the best. Dad would break out the snacks and Grandma and Grandpa would come over and play Scrabble, Boggle, or cards (Pinochle, Euchre, or Uno). I vividly remember playing games for hours on end because I often missed my favorite show line-ups of the evening: *Love Boat*, *Fantasy Island*, and *The Twilight Zone*.

In my eyes, Grandma was the queen of Scrabble, the master of the six and seven word finds in Boggle, and to this day, the best crossword puzzle solver I’ve ever known. Back then, my goal was to beat or even tie Grandma in any game. No matter what we played, she decimated all of us, showing no mercy. You see, Grandma wasn’t the type to just let her grandkids win, for pete sakes; she came with her own Scrabble Dictionary! Around fourth grade, it became pretty clear that my only chance of winning would be to memorize the entire dictionary or subject myself to a strenuous regiment of word study and reading for the next thirty years or so.

As years passed, Grandma continued to beat me, although the gap started to narrow. As I got older and perhaps a little wiser, new games entered the picture. I was confident that Balderdash was going to be Grandma's downfall, especially since the premise of the game is lying. To my surprise, Grandma continued to prevail and surprisingly, could fib with believable flair. I treasure those memories and have grown to appreciate the life lessons she subtly passed on to me during our casual game conversations...*spend time, not money on children, you learn the most in difficult situations, education is opportunity...*

Although I never officially beat Grandma (it certainly wasn't from a lack of effort), I attribute her strong literary influence as a contributing factor to the genuine passion I now have for word games, reading, and writing. I wish that every child could have this kind of positive influence in their life...what a difference it would make.

In education, we have daily opportunities to be the teacher who propels a student into lifelong literacy or just the opposite...the one who turns them off. When you think about it, we really are the masters of the universe. We hold the keys to the future, our youth. Our words, our actions, our lessons, and our mission- to cultivate students' thirst for knowledge so reading and writing become the oasis in the desert- matter.

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<sup>i</sup> "Contentions: the beliefs and/or research that support the approach to teaching-writing being demonstrated"

<sup>ii</sup> "Process: the steps involved in the demonstration, including the supplies and/or equipment that are required"

<sup>iii</sup> "Related Reading: the published theories and/or research that support the approach being demonstrated"

<sup>iv</sup> "Samples: sample handouts and/or student responses."